



Lincoln Welcomes VA Secretary to Arkansas to Highlight Rural Veterans' Health Care Services

Little Rock – U.S. Senator Blanche Lincoln today welcomed U.S. Secretary of Veterans Administration (VA), General Eric K. Shinseki, to Little Rock's John L. McClellan Veterans Hospital to discuss veterans' health care services with Arkansas veterans and VA staff.

Today's event highlighted the VA's commitment to the nearly three million veterans living in rural America.

"Many of Arkansas's veterans live in rural areas and travel great distances to receive necessary medical care," **said Lincoln**. "In addition, rural veterans face numerous challenges accessing health care because there is a shortage of providers—particularly mental and specialty providers.

"As the Senate Chair for Rural Outreach, I have made veterans' health care a central focus, and I am so pleased that the VA and Secretary Shinseki have made a commitment to create rural programs specifically designed to reach Arkansas's rural veterans. Rural America has committed a disproportionate share to our nation's war effort, and as a nation, we need to provide our veterans with the care they need and have earned, regardless of where they live."

"Senator Lincoln's commitment to veterans across Arkansas is unwavering," **said Secretary Shinseki**. "Her tremendous leadership has provided for our nation's heroes. I look forward to working with the Senator to continue to improve access to quality care for veterans in Arkansas."

Secretary Shinseki highlighted the VA's new \$215 million

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funding project, which will be used to build new outpatient clinics, fund mobile health clinics to deliver services by driving to where veterans live, expand collaborations between the VA and the federal and local community partners, speed the use of telemedicine, look at new technologies, and fund innovative pilot programs like the one recently launched at the North Little Rock Regional Office.

Arkansas is home to five VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinics, which serve our rural veterans in El Dorado, Hot Springs, Mena, Mountain Home, and Pine Bluff. A new outpatient clinic is set to open in Searcy next month, and two additional clinics are set to open in Conway and Russellville by September 2010.

Today's meeting also included a telehealth and telemedicine demonstration that allows veterans to talk to a VA physician if they are unable to drive to a VA clinic or VA hospital.

Lincoln is a cosponsor of the *Rural Veterans Healthcare Improvement Act*, which would provide new avenues for the Veterans Administration (VA) to provide greater access to care for veterans living in rural areas far from VA facilities.

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